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ABSTRACT

This monograph explores the particular kind of shyness that manifests itself in quietness or avoidance of talk by students in the classroom. It deals with the consequences and diagnosis of such shyness, the subjective experience, the causes, and the treatment. In addition, it offers classroom activities and exercises designed to remedy the condition. (MKM)

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# SHYNESS AND RETICENCE IN STUDENTS

*Paul G. Friedman*

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# INTRODUCTION

Most classroom education is carried out through talk. Teachers transmit instructions, information, and questions orally. This process is not complete unless students also use speech to indicate comprehension, to request clarification, and to apply and extend their learnings. However, surveys reveal that up to 28 percent of students do so insufficiently.[20]

Students can be quiet during classroom interaction for a variety of reasons. Some, such as those who have not done their homework, who cannot read the material being discussed, who are uninterested in the subject, who are physically exhausted or undernourished, etc., do not have an appropriate response available. Others are by choice reserved, modest, unmotivated to communicate any more than is minimally necessary.[7] Quietness due to these factors is not the concern of this review.

A third group of students commonly experience instances in which they have something relevant to say, but hesitate to do so. Furthermore, they and their listeners would prefer that they speak up more often. When the ability and desire to participate exist but the process of verbalizing is inhibited, shyness or reticence is occurring. The nature and treatment of this gap between conceiving and uttering a message will be addressed here.

Almost everyone experiences shyness on occasion. For some students, however, this state pervades their in- and out-of-classroom lives. One survey revealed that apprehension about public speaking was the most commonly reported fear.[6] Another found that 80 percent of the respondents have been shy at some time in their lives, 25 percent were chronically shy, and 4 percent felt themselves to be shy virtually all the time.[7] Data from 20,000 college students at three universities suggest that 15 to 20 percent suffer from debilitating communication apprehension (CA).[40] Among youngsters, 42 percent of fourth to sixth graders reported shyness, and 54 percent of junior high school students did so — girls more often than boys.[82]

The degree of shyness, or range of situations which it affects, varies markedly from individual to individual. A tendency to be anxious when communicating may be specific to only a few settings (e.g., public speaking), may exist in most everyday communication situations, or may even be part of a general anxiety trait that arises in many facets of an individual's life. Speech anxiety, therefore, may be conceived along a continuum of *pervasiveness*.

Different terms are used in the literature with little consistency, each roughly representing points along this continuum.[65] At one end is anxiety felt only in a particular "state" of affairs, often termed *stage fright* or another narrowly defined phobia. In the middle are terms such as *shyness, reticence, communication apprehension, speech anxiety,* and *social isolation,* which refer to the presence of anxiety and inhibition in most situations in which talking is the primary mode of relating to others. At the far end of the continuum is an enduring personality "trait" wherein an individual is predisposed to respond with anxiety to a wide range of stimuli. Our concern will be primarily with the middle range. Since those terms do not as yet have clearly distinguished referents, they will all be used interchangeably here.

Furthermore, there are commonly thought to be three different response modes people employ in anxiety-provoking experiences: approach, autonomic, and avoidance. People in the first group manifest their shyness by *increasing* their level of talk. Their fear of not being understood or of appearing foolish causes them to talk on and on, hoping that each new set of comments will assure them communicative success. The second group is emotionally shy; their fear of the risk involved in exposing their inner selves through speech leads them to confine their comments to ritualized, superficial small talk.[75] These patterns are closely related to the kind of shyness that manifests itself in quietness or avoidance of talk, but due to the limits of this volume, this last kind of shyness will be emphasized here.

## CONSEQUENCES

One might ask, "So what?" When remaining quiet, people retain their privacy and protect their inner lives from inappropriate exposure.[32] Many teachers *prefer* reserved, docile students.[66] Nevertheless, when a reticent stance dominates a child's approach to interaction, many other undesirable consequences can occur.

Shy students are less likely than their peers to take full advantage of opportunities available to them in school. They avoid seeking help from advisers.[40] When they can, they choose large lecture classes over those in which participation is likely to be expected.[41] They contribute less in

small groups, and their comments are more likely to be irrelevant.[38] In such discussions, their self-consciousness can decrease their ability to recall what is being said.[39]

Shyness affects where they choose to sit. In a traditionally arranged classroom, shy students usually avoid the front row and the middle seats in the next few rows. If the classroom is arranged in a semicircle with the teacher in the center, verbal students usually choose to sit opposite the teacher, while the quiet ones prefer seats along the side. When a classroom is arranged in modular form, with several tables positioned around the room, verbal students tend to sit at the head and foot of the tables, while the quiet students choose to sit on the sides.[40] Their choices are based on the observed tendency of teachers to direct their attention and comments toward those central areas where the most verbal students choose to sit, and not to those on the periphery. This behavior applies whether or not students have free choice of seating, and thus is not simply a function of the teacher's response to the highly verbal students.

Furthermore, when an individualized instructional system is used (wherein students work at their own pace on prepackaged materials and tutorial assistance is available from the teacher on a one-to-one basis), shy students, even if they are having great difficulty mastering the material, tend to avoid asking for help.[41] That request, along with many others in their lives, requires that they speak up, which they avoid even at the expense of doing poorly in class. As a result, shy students in this system complete fewer modules and do less well than less apprehensive students in other small college classes (of less than 30 students each). In a study of 709 students in a mass lecture course, however, no relationship whatsoever was found between communication apprehension and achievement. Since oral communication is usually so essential to learning, it is not surprising that shy students' overall grade point averages, ACT, and SAT scores tend to be lower than those of less apprehensive students.[41]

Furthermore, as one study of junior-high-age children found, shy students develop more negative attitudes toward school than their non-shy peers.[28] Their teachers, too, tend to see students who are highly apprehensive about speaking up as having lower potential for academic achievement, less satisfactory relationships with other students, and lower probability for future success than they do others with less apprehension.[42]

This pattern has a negative spiraling affect. Shy children do not usually volunteer in class and are hesitant when doing so. Hence, they are often perceived as less capable, and are thus called on less frequently than

their verbal peers.[56] Their lack of enthusiasm limits teacher caring or liking for them[24] which further reinforces their own low self-evaluation. This pattern is supported in a study which found that highly socially anxious students perceived identical evaluations they received as more unfavorable than did a low-anxious group. The study also reported that highly anxious students felt worse about and rated themselves as significantly more likely to receive such evaluations than did the low-anxious group.[72]

These negative consequences invade other arenas in their lives as well. Many shy children lack friends. Fourth to sixth graders picked shy children as playmates less often than they did non-shys.[14] As a result, as was found in a study of four- to eleven-year-olds, shy children are more likely to be emotionally disturbed.[17] Shyness is also manifested in hesitation about disclosing much about oneself,[46] about interacting with strangers, about accepting blind dates, and about socializing with people other than a primary partner.[47] Other people, including those who are also shy themselves, are less attracted to quiet individuals.[43] Their reticence results in their being perceived as less competent — thus they appear to be less desirable as task partners — and as less sociable — thus they are seen to be less appealing as friends.[34]

Shy students tend to confine their career aspirations to vocations that require little verbal interaction.[13] They seem to have a higher need to avoid failure; they also have less achievement or success motivation than their more verbal peers.[22] They tend to avoid opportunities for jobs and advancements that will make verbal demands on them, even if these would bring more income and/or higher status.[16] Their fears may be related to the fact that studies show that shy individuals are less likely to be hired after an interview, less likely to be leaders at work, less likely to be satisfied with their jobs or occupations, less likely to have good relations with peers, supervisors and subordinates, and less likely to advance in a business organization than their more verbal co-workers.[12]

The impact of reticence extends even beyond work to the home setting. In one study, comparisons were made between the housing choices of students who were high and low in communication apprehension. Students were asked to choose between several options which previous research found to be differentiated by the degree to which social interaction among neighbors was encouraged. As expected, high apprehensives favored housing in low interaction areas, while low apprehensives favored housing in high interaction areas.[45] Clearly, shyness in many ways limits student opportunities and relationships.

# DIAGNOSIS

How can one tell to what extent a child is shy? Mere quietness is not a reliable indicator. Since shyness is a subjective experience, behavioral signs can be misread. Half of a group of students who saw themselves as shy were not viewed as shy by their friends.[82] Such a high percentage of error might exist for several reasons. Reticent people who are physically attractive are often misconstrued as being aloof or snobbish by others. Other reticent people seem to *prefer* being on their own. But this, too, can be an erroneous assumption. Generally, non-shy students report greater liking for spending time alone than do those who are shy.[82] Shyness is usually viewed by those who experience it as a personal flaw, as a weakness, as something to hide. Hence shy persons often attempt to disguise whatever embarrassment they feel or feign disinterest in situations calling for social interaction — thereby making their reticence seem to stem from choice rather than compulsion.[53]

As mentioned earlier, several studies show that when only mild or moderate stress exists, verbal productivity often *increases*. A clear correlation between level of anxiety and quietness prevails only when one is experiencing a high degree of stress.[55] Consequently, the shy person may also talk quite a bit when not made severely uncomfortable by the social demands of a situation. For this reason, perhaps, most teachers, too, are not very accurate in assessing which students in their class feel themselves to be shy. An exception to this pattern exists for teachers who see themselves as shy.[81] Personal experience with shyness seems to help them to be more effective in correctly diagnosing the presence of this syndrome in others.

Since the presence or absence of quietness is not sufficient to indicate the existence of reticence, other behavioral cues can also be used.[11] A soft voice, low eye contact, and blushing are common.[82] A pattern of avoiding social interaction, not initiating or sustaining conversations, and rarely offering opinions or saying no to requests has also been noted.[23] Shy children more frequently have articulation inaccuracies.[14] Posture tension, filled pauses, speech rate, and shifts in posture, as well, often characterize someone experiencing speech anxiety.[29]

Phillips, Butt, and Metzger advise teachers to use the following ten items to identify a reticent student:

1. Student does not voluntarily make contributions in class; does not raise hand, does not add information.

2. Student seems shaky during oral recitations; asserts that he came prepared but it did not seem to come out right.
3. Student talks about symptoms when called on to recite: rapid heartbeat, headache, butterflies in the stomach, nausea.
4. Student has attempted to recite or perform orally and has quit because of fear or apprehension.
5. Student seems unable to communicate with you during conferences or other times when the two of you have tried to talk alone.
6. Student seems to have some communication problem which does not quite fall into the purview of the speech correctionist.
7. Student has seemed to you to be excessively quiet; does not participate in oral interaction with his peers.
8. Student seems unnaturally apologetic when ideas are challenged; backs off, seems to change ideas to accommodate antagonist.
9. Student has shown resistance when written assignments were to be presented orally: classroom reports, book reviews, etc.
10. Parents have told you student does not communicate well with them.[82]

Despite efforts to identify outward signs of reticence, the problem remains essentially a phenomenological one. Most widely used approaches to identifying shy students rely on self-reports. One investigator simply asks students whether or not they see themselves as shy.[82] A more elaborate set of instruments used for assessing the needs of college students seeking help at a campus shyness clinic includes the Social Self-Esteem Inventory[23] and scales developed by Watson and Friend to measure Social Avoidance and Distress and Fear of Negative Evaluation.[74] The Phillips-Erickson Reticence Scale has been used on other campuses.[69] In another study[8] it was found that scores on two scales of the Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation-Behavior[79] instrument (FIRO-B) effectively discriminated reticent from nonreticent students and correlated highly with the Phillips-Erickson test. These were the "expressed inclusion" and "expressed affection" scales. (Briefly, inclusion behavior involves interacting and seeking attention, acknowledgment, prominence, recognition, status, and prestige. Affection behavior refers to close emotional feelings between two people.) Low

scores on these two scales can be used to identify secondary and older students who are reticent.

A well-validated scale to measure communication apprehension in school children is the Personal Report of Communication Fear (PRCF).[40] It can be used in all grades from kindergarten on. For children above the sixth grade, it can be given in written form. Younger children should have the test read aloud.

*Directions:* The following 14 statements concern feelings about communicating with other people. Please indicate the degree to which each statement applies to you by circling your response. Mark "YES" if you strongly agree, "yes" if you agree, "?" if you are unsure, "no" if you disagree, or "NO" if you strongly disagree. There are no right or wrong answers. Work quickly; record your first impression.

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 1. | Talking with someone new scares me. |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 2. | I look forward to talking in class. |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 3. | I like standing up and talking to a group of people. |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 4. | I like to talk when the whole class listens. |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 5. | Standing up to talk in front of other people scares me. |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 6. | I like talking to teachers. |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 7. | I am scared to talk to people. |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 8. | I like it when it is my turn to talk in class. |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 9. | I like to talk to new people. |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 10. | When someone asks me a question, it scares me. |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 11. | There are a lot of people I am scared to talk to. |

YES yes ? no NO 12. I like to talk to people I haven't met before.

YES yes ? no NO 13. I like it when I don't have to talk.

YES yes ? no NO 14. Talking to teachers scares me.

(Scoring: YES=1, yes=2, ?=3, no=4, NO=5)

To obtain the score for the PRCF, complete the following steps: (1) Add the scores for the following items: 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, and 12. (2) Add the scores on the following items: 1, 5, 7, 10, 11, 13, and 14. (3) Add 42 to the total of step 1. (4) Subtract the total of step 2 from the total of step 3. Your score should be between 14 and 70.

The normal range of scores on the PRCF is between 28 and 47. Children who score above 47 are most likely communication apprehensive. These are the children who need very careful, special attention. Those who score below 28, on the other hand, are very low in CA.

Administrations of an earlier form of the PRCF to secondary and college students reveal some distinctive response patterns. Junior high students are more apprehensive about preparing and presenting a speech and about participating in group discussion. Senior high students are more tense about conversing with a new acquaintance and fear facing an audience. College students feel more tense when expressing opinions at meetings or in class.[48]

These findings suggest that shyness is not a global state that applies equally to all situations. Quiggins, starting with 175 different variables affecting speech anxiety, developed the Communication Situation Inventory which quickly assesses the student's degree of anxiety in seven essential contexts.[65] The student uses the following rating for the items given: (1) *strongly disagree*, (2) *disagree*, (3) *undecided*, (4) *agree*, or (5) *strongly agree*.

1. When I am in a small group, I usually keep quiet and let others do the talking.
2. I am afraid to express myself in a group.

3. My mouth gets very dry when I'm introduced to someone of the opposite sex for the first time.

4. My head seems to wobble when I try to talk with someone important.

5. When I talk with a friend, I feel very natural.

6. I feel at ease discussing personal things about me with my family.

7. I avoid frank discussions of my life or activities with my folks.

8. I look forward to an opportunity to speak in public.

9. I find the prospect of an interracial friendship pleasant and enjoyable.

10. I generally prefer to talk with people of my own race.

11. I talk fluently with friends.

12. I usually fidget when I talk with someone of the opposite sex.

13. I feel tense when my teacher speaks with me.

14. I am fearful and tense all the while I am with a person of another race.

15. Although I am nervous just before getting up to speak, I soon forget my fears and enjoy the experience.

16. When several of my friends and I get together, I feel free to be myself and say what I please.

17. I seldom sit down and talk with my parents about my personal problems.

18. I feel comfortable during conversations with my teacher.

19. I would enjoy presenting a speech on a local television show.

20. I feel afraid to speak up at group meetings.

21. I dread the times I have to talk with my teacher.

The seven factors and the corresponding items are Public Speaking (8, 15, 19); Group Communication (1, 2, 20); Important Other Male or Female (3, 4, 12); Friend to Friend (5, 11, 16); Student to Teacher (13, 18, 21); Child to Parent (6, 7, 17); Interracial (9, 10, 14). The student may be diagnosed as anxious in whichever category her/his average score is below the midpoint.

The foregoing tests give children's shyness score but provide only a partial picture of their personal world. Other sources use more detailed self-reports to fill out our sense of what it is like to be reticent. Such individuals generally feel that their anxiety about the exposure which accompanies speaking outweighs the anticipation of rewards to be gained. The personal risk or cost usually seems greater to them than the expected gain.[59] This reaction can be based on a lack of trust in their ability to speak.[22] Socially anxious students underestimated judges' ratings of their social skills and overestimated how apparent their social anxiety was to a greater extent than a more confident group.[9]

In general, shy people experience an exaggerated degree of self-consciousness[82] or a fear of negative evaluation from others.[69] Their critical posture applies to themselves and to others, i.e., they are less self-confident and more intolerant of others than are those who are not shy.[73]

Personality measures indicate that students who experience high apprehension about speaking are lower than others in tolerance for ambiguity, self-control, adventurousness, and emotional maturity. Their general anxiety level is higher, as are their dogmatism, external locus of control, and lack of trustfulness.[44] Their inhibitions may affect their lives in a reluctance to reach out to others. In one study highly socially anxious students were less willing to help others in an ambiguous situation than were students low in social anxiety.[50] In other words, the highly socially anxious seem to see more risk or danger in becoming involved in other people's lives.

Speech anxiety was found to be *unrelated* to scores on sophistication, self-sufficiency, sensitivity, eccentricity, radicalism, and intelligence.[44] This last finding should be contrasted with another study that found that shy junior high school girls rated *themselves* less intelligent than did non-shy girls or than boys did (i.e., they checked "I'm not as smart as the other students here" more often).[82] As a group, shy children are *not* less intelligent than others, but many believe they are. Thus, children may be shy because they believe they lack intelligence and hence remain quiet, feeling their comments are worth less than others'; or they may have less confidence in their intelligence because those who speak up get more affirmations and acknowledgment in this area from their active participation in classroom

dialogue. In yet another study this relationship between shyness and confidence was corroborated. Scores of reticence and self-esteem had correlations of – .48, and scores of reticence and self-acceptance had correlations of – .52.[11]

One dimension of speech anxiety, termed "stage fright," refers to what is experienced when making a public presentation, usually a speech. When asked to describe this condition, a group of college students provided eleven kinds of statements describing their subjective experience of stage fright. These statements were then employed on a questionnaire given to 209 other students. Their responses were factor analyzed into three categories: *Prior Apprehension* (before speaking "my heart beats faster," "I perspire," I lose "sleep the night before," I find it "hard to concentrate" in prior classes, I "find it difficult to relax"); *Avoidance* ("I wish my speech was over," "I dread giving speeches," "I would rather take a few more tests"); and *Tension* ("I feel nervous," "I feel relieved when my speech is over").[12]

In a study of diary reports from 198 habitually reticent college-age persons, nine features of their personal experience seemed to stand out:

1. They reported shakiness which interfered with their attempts to communicate during the classroom recitations and public performances. They often remarked that despite the fact they had prepared well, "things did not come out right."
2. They reported that during attempts to speak they were conscious of physical symptoms, "butterflies in the stomach," loud or rapid heartbeat, headache, throbbing temples, nausea, excessive perspiration, and inability to see the audience. While normal speakers often reported some of these symptoms before they spoke, their symptoms tended to disappear during the act of speaking. Reticent subjects also reported that they felt no sense of relief or accomplishment at the completion of a communication, while normals generally reported such feelings. Reticents seemed to replay their failures in retrospect and suffered from the symptoms all over again as they contemplated their "failures."
3. Virtually all reticent subjects reported that, on occasion, they found it necessary to break off communication with someone abruptly because of their fears and apprehensions.
4. Reticents expressed inability to communicate with "important" people like teachers or counselors. Most said they tried to avoid

private conferences. They expressed a fear of being asked questions and reported they relied on monosyllables and neutral responses. They also reported an inability to talk about personal problems with others. Normals, again, expressed similar concerns but generally felt, once conferences were over, that they had accomplished their communicative tasks.

5. Others, such as parents or teachers, had called communicative inadequacies to the attention of reticents, or, at least, reticents remembered more occasions when this had happened than normals remembered. Only rarely, however, could a diagnosis be made that would fit the reticents into a category considered amenable to clinical treatment. Most showed some hesitancy, vocalized pauses, diffidence in voice, or syntactic awkwardness in speech, but few conformed to common categories of speech pathologies.

6. Most reticents had an image of themselves as excessively quiet and saw themselves consistently on the fringes of social gatherings. They testified that they laughed and shouted little and avoided horseplay with peers. Normals also could report specific situations in which they felt they were too quiet, but in general they said they felt adequate in most of their interactions.

7. Reticents felt compelled to be unnaturally apologetic when their ideas were challenged and they interpreted questions about content of communication as personal criticisms. Most could cite several occasions when they found themselves changing their ideas to avoid questions or arguments. Most could remember being called "indecisive" by others.

8. Reticents preferred to communicate in writing where possible and most had achieved a fairly high level of skill at writing. Virtually all mentioned problems they had had with oral performances in public school and remembered frequently receiving poor grades on such public performances. Normal speakers had also received poor grades on some performances, but they did not recall them vividly or with concern.

9. Most reticents expressed singular inability to talk with their parents. Many stated that their parents seemed concerned about this and remarked, "You never talk things over with me."[59]

# CAUSES

Clearly, shy, reticent children are not likely to be living very pleasant or successful lives. Research indicates that this experience should be considered a problem worthy of investigation, prevention, and remediation. This effort must begin with exploration of possible causes of shyness and of factors that sustain it. Little is known with certainty about these issues, but some plausible explanations have been put forward.

It has been suggested that shyness has a genetic source. There seems to be a trait related to "susceptibility to threat" that is relatively consistent throughout one's life.[10] Thus, some children are more vulnerable to the demands of change, experience more stress, and tend to withdraw from, react to, or be exhausted by events that others endure more resiliently. While this factor may permit a reticent pattern to develop a bit more easily in these children, it certainly does not guarantee it.

The exigencies of contemporary American society have been cited by others as possible causes of shyness.[82] We tend to view an individual's worth as commensurate with how much or how well the person achieves, rather than as a given that is assumed fundamentally. Such conditional approval leads to the mental set of seeing oneself as a success or failure depending on what one produces. Shy students do seem to have adopted this highly evaluative orientation to self and others.[73] Another phenomenon of modern life is the high degree of mobility among families. In one study of eighth graders, those who had moved more often were found to be more lonely, less sociable.[81] In still another study, of fourth to sixth graders, shy students were found to come from lower socioeconomic families than their non-shy peers.[14] Related research suggests that children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds experience more constricting child-rearing practices, tend to spend less time with their parents, have to compete with a larger number of siblings for parental attention, have less living space (and hence must withdraw inward for privacy), and may do less oral communicating at home.[4] However, these hypotheses do not fully explain why many children raised under such conditions do not develop the syndrome.

It seems that more idiosyncratic experiences in the development of shy children need to be explored before assuming that the causes of shyness are understood. Since it has been found that many children enter

kindergarten already reticent, the family environment must be considered influential.[39] In some homes, quiet behavior is consistently reinforced. Some parents believe in a "children should be seen and not heard" philosophy. They advocate and praise behavior that leads to a reserved manner of self-presentation. Others parents engage children in dialogue and encourage free, uninhibited expression. These divergent norms lead to development of a personal style that carries over into classroom life.[40]

Teachers, too, can contribute to the maintenance of a reticent oral style. Studies have established that during their first years in the classroom, teacher attitudes shift in the direction of less concern with pupil freedom and more emphasis on social controls and establishing a "stable, orderly classroom in which academic standards receive a prominent position."[66]

Surveys report that many teachers rate as most important for their classrooms those social skills concerned with order, rules, obedience, and responsibility, and attach less value to skills that involve taking initiative and being outgoing and assertive in interpersonal relationships.[8]

In the course of children's lives isolated incidents that have an especially marked effect on their approach to speaking can occur. These "traumatic experiences" can cause emotional scars that are long-lasting. They might happen during the oedipal period, when children yearn for extraordinary parental intimacy that must be denied, causing them to blame themselves for the rejection they perceive. One psychoanalyst has reported that in his shy patients these fears of being unwanted or ignored are displaced by grandiose fantasies of having an enormous effect on others and by preoccupation with self (i.e., narcissism), traits others commonly find in reticent individuals.[30] Traumatic events might also occur during early attempts at public performance that go awry, and the ensuing laughter or criticism is taken "personally." Older reticent students can often recall such embarrassing moments vividly, but the impact is difficult to assess.[59]

Children evolve traits from what is said to or about them, as well as from what happens to them. Instances have been reported in which people traced the onset of shyness to being told in early childhood that they were shy by significant adults.[82] Henceforth they saw themselves as having this problem to overcome, thereby heightening their self-consciousness and fear of failure. The label of shyness can be adopted in a more subtle way by the causes to which one attributes positive and negative communication experiences. One shyness therapist found that his clients tended to attribute their speaking successes to "luck" and their failures to their own lack of ability.[23] This cause-effect thought pattern had been set in motion early in

life. He encouraged them instead to reverse their attributions, i.e., to give themselves credit for successful experiences and to explain failures as caused by conditions external to themselves. The latter pattern bolsters self-esteem and encourages investment of renewed effort to achieve communication goals.

Of course, some unpleasant communication experiences are not blown out of proportion or distorted — individuals sometimes really do stick their proverbial feet in their mouths and are wise to avoid repeating blunders. In such cases, an error in social etiquette or skills was made. Until a more appropriate approach to these situations is learned, an individual is understandably reticent in them. Lacking the functional social skills in one's behavioral repertoire to employ in unfamiliar contexts can be caused by many factors. One is simply lack of practice. Some say children who watch a lot of television are missing out on opportunities to experience social interaction.[52] One study found that children from rural backgrounds, who have had little contact with adults and are then uncertain about schoolroom norms of behavior, are likely to become reticent in that setting.[26] Another reported that children from first or second generation highly ethnic homes and communities may experience similar dissonance in language use and social norms upon attending school.[61] Still a third study of 128 secondary school students found that proportionately more subjects high in communication apprehension were raised in large families than in moderate-sized families, and more were found among the latter group than among only children.[57] It is believed that children in larger families get less parental attention and training. Later born children get still less than those born first, as do those in families where children are closer in age than in families where they are spaced more widely in years. These findings may apply only to older children. Another study found that later born grade schoolers were more popular, and that it was the first born who had fewer social skills.[32] These disparate findings can be integrated by hypothesizing that children who interact primarily with siblings and friends when young learn skills needed to get along better with other children, but children with more opportunities to talk with their parents are less shy in school when dealing with adult authority figures.[5]

There seem to be many possible sources of shyness. This multiplicity of cause-effect theories is common in examining human behavior. The many theories imply that individuals need to be viewed as unique and that several factors in their life experience must be explored before assuming that the etiology of their reticence is understood.

# TREATMENT

## PREVENTION

Having developed a general understanding of the nature, sources, and consequences of shyness, one is moved to examine methods of treatment. What *can* we *do* for the student ensnared in this syndrome?

To answer this query, let us first examine our perspective on treatment. The question presumes a remedial or medical approach to the problem. It focuses attention on the reticent individual and on his/her dysfunctional symptoms. To effectively remediate every reticent student would be a Herculean task. It is a conceivable, but impractical, target. A more realistic aim, to which we should address ourselves first, is to alter the conditions under which this problem is likely to develop. The steps which can be taken to *prevent* reticence from occurring are much more feasible than what must be done to "cure" it.

Surveys indicate that the incidence of shyness is much greater in some cultural settings than in others. For example, a much higher percentage of Japanese students than Israeli students are shy.[82] This finding suggests that conditions in some social groups encourage or discourage the development of reticence. Drawing upon such findings, Zimbardo created the following design for a society in which shyness is most likely to exist:

1. Valuing rugged individualism (making it on one's own, going it alone, doing it my way).
2. Promoting a cult of the ego (narcissistic introspection, self-absorption, and self-consciousness).
3. Prizing individual success and making failure a source of personal shame in a highly competitive system.
4. Setting limitless aspirations and ambiguous criteria for success, while not teaching ways of coping with failure.
5. Discouraging expression of emotions and open sharing of feelings and anxieties.
6. Providing little opportunity for intimate relations between the sexes and strict taboos on most forms of sexual expression.
7. Making acceptance and love contingent on fluctuating and critical social standards of performance.

8. Denying the significance of an individual's present experience by making comparisons to the unmatchable glories of past times and the demands of future goals.

9. Fostering social instability through mobility, divorce, economic uncertainty, and any other way possible.

10. Destroying faith in common societal goals and pride in belonging to the group.[8]

Teachers should examine the conditions within their communities and classrooms to see whether any of these tendencies exist. But what, on the other hand, is the nature of a *healthy* communication context, a classroom in which reticence is least likely to develop?

For over a year Friedman and Sorber worked closely with a group of thirty elementary and secondary school teachers focusing attention on the prevention of reticent behavior. This group was given the following list of possible classroom strategies.[9] Teachers were asked to check either Yes or No for each strategy depending on whether or not they felt it would help to minimize reticence. (They omitted items which they had not tried themselves.) This is a summary of their responses given in the order in which they were thought to be helpful.

| Yes | No | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 30 | 0 | 1. | Creating a warm, easygoing climate in the classroom |
| 30 | 0 | 2. | Talking about the most relevant, stimulating topics possible |
| 29 | 0 | 3. | Providing lots of oral classroom activities |
| 29 | 0 | 4. | Helping your students get to know one another at the beginning of the school year |
| 29 | 0 | 5. | Using drama and role-playing situations as often as possible |
| 29 | 0 | 6. | Having lots of class discussions |
| 25 | 1 | 7. | Having students speak to the class in groups or panels rather than individually |
| 28 | 2 | 8. | Allowing students to work with classmates they feel most comfortable with |

| Yes | No | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 27 | 2 | 9. | Sequencing oral activities beginning with those which are least threatening (e.g., group work) and proceeding gradually to those which are more threatening (e.g., giving a speech) |
| 27 | 2 | 10. | Having students speak from their seats rather than from the front of the room |
| 27 | 2 | 11. | Praising reticent students' work as often as possible |
| 27 | 2 | 12. | Occasionally asking students to write about their feelings regarding classroom participation |
| 26 | 2 | 13. | Teaching the class about the process of oral communication |
| 26 | 2 | 14. | Having the class sit in a circle rather than in rows |
| 27 | 3 | 15. | Sensitizing students to the feelings which lie behind the speaking act |
| 25 | 3 | 16. | Holding private conferences with reticent students |
| 25 | 4 | 17. | Structuring oral activities clearly and specifically so students know exactly what to do |
| 24 | 4 | 18. | Having discussions that relate to the students' personal lives |
| 24 | 5 | 19. | Having lots of small group work |
| 23 | 5 | 20. | Having students conduct the class by themselves as often as possible |
| 22 | 5 | 21. | Not grading classroom participation |
| 22 | 5 | 22. | Calling on students only for answers you think they can handle |
| 22 | 6 | 23. | Having students make as many decisions as possible about the way the class will be conducted |
| 20 | 6 | 24. | Holding an open discussion of reticence problems with the class |
| 19 | 6 | 25. | Never criticizing a student's speaking except in a private conference |
| 20 | 7 | 26. | Having students grade themselves as much as possible |

| Yes | No | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 18 | 8 | 27 | Having lots of student debates |
| 19 | 9 | 28 | Giving students the option not to participate orally |
| 19 | 10 | 29 | Using a system to insure equal class participation by everyone |
| 17 | 10 | 30 | Clarifying by the teacher on the first day that reticence is a problem he/she cares about and encouraging students always to be frank about it with the teacher |

The following are several strategies occasionally proposed for dealing with reticent students that these teachers generally did *not* see as helpful.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 11 | 12 | 31 | Giving students time to prepare what they will say rather than having spontaneous talks or discussions |
| 11 | 13 | 32 | Making a "contract" with reticent students to speak more |
| 13 | 14 | 33 | Having impersonal rather than personal discussions |
| 11 | 14 | 34 | Gently forcing reticent students to speak |
| 11 | 15 | 35 | Pairing up a reticent and a highly verbal student |
| 12 | 15 | 36 | Never mentioning the problem directly |
| 9 | 18 | 37 | Asking reticent students to read aloud |
| 8 | 18 | 38 | Grouping reticent students together to do their work |
| 10 | 19 | 39 | Having strict rather than loose discipline |
| 6 | 20 | 40 | Disagreeing with reticent students to pull them into discussions |
| 4 | 24 | 41 | Establishing a separate class for reticent students |
| 2 | 24 | 42 | Having boys and girls work in separate groups rather than together |
| 4 | 26 | 43 | Grouping students homogeneously according to ability rather than heterogeneously |
| 1 | 26 | 44 | Limiting discussions to factual comments rather than encouraging opinions |

Two hundred secondary school students (grades 7–11) from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds were asked to help in understanding how students themselves felt about commonly suggested ways to improve participation in classroom learning. It was made clear that no choice was right or wrong, but that only student preferences based on recollection of all their current and prior classroom expriences were being sought. Their teachers were asked to indicate which students were reticent. Responses of reticent students are differentiated from those of students who do participate orally.

The approaches preferred by students are highlighted on the following form by being capitalized. Thus, one can make a quick survey of what conditions students believe will prevent reticence by reading over those items. (Specific results are given in percentages to facilitate comparisons.)[20]

WHEN THE WHOLE CLASS IS HAVING A DISCUSSION, I AM MORE WILLING TO PARTICIPATE IF

| | | Reticent | Non-Reticent | All |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | a. the teacher calls on people. | 40 | 37 | 38 |
| | B. the teacher calls only on people who raise their hands. | 60 | 63 | 62 |
| 2 | A. the teacher grades us on our participation. | 57 | 50 | 50 |
| | b. the teacher doesn't grade us on our participation. | 43 | 50 | 50 |
| 3 | A. the topic is from everyday life. | 81 | 70 | 72 |
| | b. the topic is from the class subject matter. | 19 | 30 | 28 |
| 4 | A. we are giving opinions. | 78 | 87 | 85 |
| | b. we are giving facts. | 22 | 13 | 15 |
| 5 | a. I have to read something aloud. | 19 | 14 | 15 |
| | B. I have to say something I believe. | 81 | 86 | 85 |
| 6 | A. I know almost everyone in the class. | 94 | 94 | 94 |
| | b. I know very few people in the class. | 6 | 6 | 6 |

| | | Reticent | Non-Reticent | All |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7. | A. the other students like the subject. | 84 | 92 | 89 |
| | b. the other students don't like the subject. | 16 | 8 | 11 |
| 8. | A. the other students talk a lot. | 57 | 58 | 58 |
| | b. the other students are mostly quiet. | 43 | 42 | 42 |

WHEN THE CLASS IS DIVIDED INTO GROUPS, I PARTICIPATE AND LEARN MORE IF

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9. | A. I work with people I pick. | 75 | 71 | 72 |
| | b. I work with people the teacher has put together. | 25 | 29 | 28 |
| 10. | a. I work with only one other person. | 34 | 37 | 34 |
| | B. I work in a group with six people in it. | 66 | 63 | 66 |
| 11. | A. I work with boys and girls. | 88 | 78 | 79 |
| | b. I work with students of my own sex. | 12 | 22 | 21 |
| 12. | A. I work with mostly quiet people. | 53 | 28 | 34 |
| | b. I work with people who talk a lot. | 47 | 72 | 66 |
| 13. | A. we have a discussion on a general topic. | 84 | 77 | 78 |
| | b. we are told exactly what to do. | 16 | 23 | 22 |
| 14. | a. the teacher is keeping an eye on us. | 25 | 18 | 20 |
| | B. the teacher leaves us to work alone. | 75 | 82 | 80 |
| 15. | A. I am graded on the work in the group. | 60 | 62 | 62 |
| | b. the work is not graded. | 40 | 38 | 38 |
| 16. | a. I am a leader of the group. | 22 | 31 | 29 |
| | B. I am just a member of the group. | 78 | 69 | 71 |

WHEN I AM IN FRONT OF THE ROOM, I FEEL LESS NERVOUS IF I

| | | Reticent | Non Reticent | All |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 17. | A read something to the class. | 53 | 46 | 46 |
| | b. speak to the class using my own words. | 47 | 54 | 54 |
| 18. | A am role-playing a character in a skit. | 60 | 63 | 63 |
| | b. am telling something about myself. | 40 | 37 | 37 |
| 19. | A can tell my opinions to the class. | 66 | 58 | 60 |
| | b. can report on some facts to the class. | 34 | 42 | 40 |
| 20. | A have picked the topic to speak about. | 66 | 83 | 79 |
| | b. speak on a topic given by the teacher. | 34 | 17 | 21 |
| 21. | A can prepare what I will say. | 84 | 69 | 72 |
| | b. speak "off the cuff" without preparation. | 16 | 31 | 28 |
| 22. | a. am given a grade on what I say. | 47 | 54 | 53 |
| | B. am not given a grade on what I say. | 53 | 46 | 47 |
| 23. | A. am a member of a panel discussion. | 75 | 80 | 78 |
| | b. speak by myself to the class. | 25 | 22 | 22 |
| 24. | A. am given criticism after I talk. | 66 | 57 | 59 |
| | b. am not given criticism after I talk. | 34 | 43 | 41 |
| 25. | A. read something I have written. | 66 | 52 | 55 |
| | b. read something from a book. | 34 | 48 | 45 |

I PARTICIPATE OR SPEAK MORE IN CLASSES WHERE

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 26. | A. the teacher asks a lot of interesting questions. | 84 | 85 | 84 |
| | b. the teacher doesn't ask many questions. | 16 | 15 | 16 |
| 27. | A. the teacher is firm and in control. | 66 | 43 | 46 |
| | b. the teacher is soft and easygoing. | 34 | 57 | 54 |

| | | Reticent | Non-Reticent | All |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 28. | A. the teacher gives his/her opinions. | 94 | 92 | 92 |
| | b. the teacher never gives his/her opinions. | 6 | 8 | 8 |
| 29. | A. the teacher knows me better. | 88 | 85 | 85 |
| | b. the teacher hardly knows me. | 12 | 15 | 15 |
| 30. | a. the teacher covers a lot of material. | 28 | 30 | 29 |
| | B. the teacher discusses almost every student's question. | 72 | 70 | 71 |
| 31. | A. the teacher lets us make decisions. | 94 | 86 | 87 |
| | b. the teacher makes nearly all the decisions. | 6 | 14 | 13. |
| 32. | A. the teacher praises my work a lot. | 66 | 61 | 63 |
| | b. the teacher hardly ever praises my work. | 34 | 39 | 37 |
| 33. | a. the teacher is almost always serious. | 28 | 18 | 20 |
| | B. the teacher kids around with us. | 72 | 82 | 80 |

It is interesting to note that on four of the items listed, #2, 12, 22, and 27, the reticent students indicated preferences somewhat different from those of their non-reticent peers. Responses to #2 and #27 suggest that teacher demand or evaluation can elicit more participation from them, but #22 suggests that *anxiety* about participation is less when their talk is not graded. Scores on #12 indicate that reticent students feel more comfortable being matched in groups with others like themselves.

The teachers' and students' responses cited provide many concrete strategies for structuring learning experiences and for teacher behavior likely to minimize reticent behavior.

As a result of this study, Friedman and Sorber developed several guidelines and activities for maintaining the kind of classroom atmosphere most likely to *prevent* reticence.[20] Examples include the following:

1. Opportunities should be provided for *everyone* to participate orally. Talking about any topic is useful in learning about it. Questions must be raised and answered, confusing aspects cleared up, comments shared, and relationships to other topics

explored. In fact, a minimum of time should pass between the teacher raising an issue or explaining an idea and hearing students' comments.

a) Allow a specific amount of time when an interesting topic is being discussed to go around the room and elicit a brief one-word or one-sentence opinion from every member of the class.

b) Let children work in small groups on appropriate projects and encourage, as one of the goals of each group, oral participation from everyone in the group. Make the group leader especially responsible for seeing that everyone talks.

c) Summarize a lesson by asking the class to think of one sentence that expresses the most important thing to be learned that day. When this has been done silently, ask the nonparticipating students to give their sentences. (No right or wrong connotation should be given the answers.)

2. Teachers should indicate that they welcome and value all students' comments in "open" classrooms.

Every comment makes sense to the individual student and arises from some inner motivation; teachers should therefore show their desire to hear what students have to say, whether or not they agree.

a) Many students, particularly in "low ability" classes, have a number of unhappy experiences in school during the day. These events snowball because resentment exists. The students may sulk or rebel and are then punished again. When a class comes into your room looking upset or excited say, "We will be studying _____ today, and it will require your full attention. Does anyone have anything to get off his/her chest now before we begin?"

b) Find the controversial issues in whatever subject you are teaching. Pass out dittoed sheets giving the issue at the top and a few stimulating questions, with space for answers, below. After students have written answers to each question, begin a discussion of the issue. Students can draw their responses from this silent preparation time.

c) Have a class discussion of feelings and their importance. Proceed from this into a role-playing situation which includes some type of problem that actually exists in the classroom or in the lives of students. Role-play the situation

one time when no one reveals real feelings and another time when everyone does reveal feelings. Discuss the difference.

d) On Friday of each week, ask students to turn in a 3 x 5 thought card on which they may write anything (or nothing). Explain that lots of things are often left unsaid in school, or thought of afterward. This is a means of establishing another channel of communication between them and you — as much a friend as a teacher. Cards will have *no* effect on grades, and they will be strictly *confidential*. They may or may not be anonymous. If some comments seem to run throughout the cards, ditto some typical excerpts and present them to the class for discussion.

3. Teacher and students should admit to errors when they are made. Teachers need to encourage students to admit their errors by creating a classroom atmosphere in which errors are not ridiculed or penalized. Teachers should set an example by admitting their own errors.

a) Each student might give a talk on "A Mistake I Have Made." They might include the events leading up to it, the reactions of any other people involved, how the situation looked to them, whether they admitted to the mistake, how they felt during the whole period of time, alternative ways they might have handled the situation.

b) Role-play a salesperson for a familiar product (e.g., a car, or even school equipment) who praises everything about the product and refuses to admit to any faults. Then role-play the salesperson who honestly admits to some inadequacies in the product. Compare reactions to each. Have students add personal experiences with salespeople.

c) Discuss the process Thomas Edison went through in inventing the light bulb. (He tried about 1,500 materials to find a good filament.) Admitting errors leaves you free to go on to do better in the future. When learning to bowl we send a ball into the gutter, then try to adjust our mistake and improve. This trial and error is needed in all learning. Have students give their own trial-and-error, personal experiences with learning.

4. Whenever possible, students should be encouraged to relate what they say to what others in the class have said.

Comments related to previous comments indicate interest and require careful and reflective listening. Drawing relationships helps others understand what one is attempting to say and how one's comments relate to their own.

a) Pair up all the students. Have one student say something and the other repeat what was said, attempting to imitate the actions and expressions of the first student.

b) When one student makes a statement, have another paraphrase it according to the way he/she understands it.

c) Have one student make a short statement and the next student repeat it, adding a statement relating to what has just been said.

d) Have one student begin a story and each student add a segment to it.

e) Divide the class into small groups; ask each group to role-play a situation in which a conflict of some kind occurred because people did not try to understand the point of view of others. Replay each scene trying to find alternative ways of better handling the situations.

f) If two people have differing points of view on a subject, have them sit in chairs facing each other. As they make alternating statements on the topic, have them move their chairs closer together or farther apart, depending on whether they agree or disagree at each point of the conversation. Discuss what happened and why.

5 Classroom discussion should be among students as well as between teacher and students.

Students need to regard one another as potential sources of learning. Respect for oneself and one's peers enriches learning. The goal is to help students become independent of the teacher in pursuing their education.

a) Divide children into small groups of four or five, and let the children plan an activity which they can present to the rest of the class. At first you will have to structure the activity in such a way that the children have just a small segment to prepare for the rest of the class. With more practice, the students' segment of the activity can be enlarged.

b) Many questions directed to you about the work being done or the topic under discussion can be reflected to the class by

such comments as "What do the rest of you think?" "Can anyone else answer that question?" "Let's see what other people have to say on that."

c) Before assignments are turned in, students can meet in groups to read each other's work and make necessary corrections. This activity can be "motivated" by giving every person in a group the same grade based on the average quality of work produced by the group.

d) Homework assignments can be gone over by pairs or small groups of students comparing answers. You need merely be a resource person to clarify disagreements.

e) Many routine assignment review sessions can be led by one student or a group instead of the teacher. The individual student need not have all the answers. She/he can call on others to respond and then ask the rest of the class if they agree. You need only intervene when the majority of the class is wrong.

f) Spend three or four ten-minute segments each class day during which children are requested to direct comments of any sort (preferably relevant to the learning of the day or week) to other students. This time could be structured by throwing out a topic for discussion and letting students discuss it in any way they see fit. This period could be called "student forum" time.

## FORMS OF TREATMENT

If students appear to be shy, or if their responses on one of the questionnaires mentioned earlier indicate that they perceive themselves to have this problem, then what approaches to treatment are available to a concerned educator? Several kinds have been employed. They fall under four general headings:

1. Decreasing the debilitating anxiety that precedes and accompanies the act of speaking.

2. Improving insight or understanding regarding the source and nature of the mode of response
3. Teaching social skills that improve students' ability to present themselves effectively
4. Altering the self-perceptions related to the low level of self-confidence

Each of these approaches will be discussed in turn.

## REDUCING ANXIETY

Shyness, as mentioned earlier, is usually accompanied by a constellation of physical symptoms that are aroused by feelings of anxiety. People remain quiet, in part, to avoid, hide, or cope with these physiological disturbances. If anxiety can be decreased, shyness is likely to fade.

Two major approaches have been used to relieve a speaker's anxiety or its symptoms. One derives from processes developed in psychotherapeutic settings. Studies indicate that therapists who provide empathy, genuineness, and unconditional positive regard are effective in relieving their client's anxiety and promoting therapeutic growth. Assuming that teachers who employ these communication styles would be equally effective, Giffin[21] and Barnes[1] at the University of Kansas developed group treatment programs for students suffering from speech anxiety. In both programs most students reported and demonstrated gains in confidence and verbal activity. However, the control groups who took regular interpersonal communication courses improved nearly as well.

Although these studies do not demonstrate a need for special counseling-oriented groups for shy students, they do have implications for classroom teachers. They suggest that teachers who show students that they understand them (at an emotional as well as an informational level), that they care about them no matter how well they perform, and that they are ready to deal with students honestly and authentically, as imperfect human beings who have had similar anxieties themselves, are likely to alleviate to a large extent shy students' anxiety when communicating.

The second approach to relieving anxiety is drawn from self-modification and behavior therapies. It focuses on relieving the symptoms of anxiety. It has been found that people can learn to control their own levels

of relaxation. Once individuals can put themselves into a relaxed state, free from anxiety symptoms, they can use this ability to enter into situations that might have evoked those symptoms with greatly reduced tension.[80] Their ability to be relaxed when speaking is developed by first becoming relaxed, then imagining themselves in a minimally threatening context. After they can remain relaxed with this situation in mind, they move on to evoking mental images that are gradually more challenging until they learn to be relaxed when picturing themselves giving a speech or engaging in whatever speaking activities had customarily evoked their anxiety symptoms. This learned substitution of a relaxed state for a tense state can then be transferred to actual speaking behavior.

This method, called *systematic desensitization*, has been successfully applied in a number of studies.[25] It works especially well for reducing one's level of anxiety when preparing for and delivering a public speech. It requires the concentrated effort of a "therapist" who teaches individuals how to relax, develops with them a hierarchy of speaking situations sequenced according to the amount of anxiety each arouses, and then leads them through a process wherein the situations are brought to mind while the relaxed state is maintained. This process is beyond the training and time capacities of most classroom teachers (although audiotapes can be used for much of the process).[26] Several valuable lessons, however, may be gained from it.

First, it helps to know how a state of physical relaxation can be nurtured. Several approaches have been used. One is to be aware of and to deepen (or slow down) the rate of one's breathing. Another is progressively tensing and relaxing each set of muscles in one's body (i.e., feet, calves, thighs, stomach, chest, forearms, biceps, neck, and face). A teacher can occasionally help a student relieve anxiety symptoms in these ways.

Second, it can be useful to think of speaking activities as organized in a hierarchy from least to most stressful for an individual. Usually, we consider a brief talk to introduce oneself as a minimally challenging way to start a class. Cognitively, this makes sense. In terms of communication apprehension, however, this can be an extremely demanding task. A hierarchy of anxiety-evoking speech events might begin with participating as a member of a dyad, then a small group, then reading aloud or role-playing, then making a group presentation to the class, and ending with a solo speech. Although this sequence might differ among individuals, considering the risk-level of classroom speaking events and sequencing them appropriately would facilitate the remediation of reticent students.

## INSIGHT AND UNDERSTANDING

We know that of two people facing the same social situation, one can look forward to it and the other can dread it. Each has a different "set" of expectations for that event. One anticipates a rewarding, enjoyable experience, the other a miserable, anxious time. These divergent orientations are based on those individuals' assumptions about themselves and about how they relate to people. For example, if I believe that in order to be accepted at a party I must respond to all comments in a rapid, fluent, composed, witty manner, then I will constantly be on edge trying to do so. If I believe that everyone in my class, including the teacher, must like everything I say, then I am unlikely to risk volunteering to speak for fear of alienating anyone. In other words, one's beliefs or inner messages about communication can support a pattern of reticence. Awareness and modification of the sequence of thoughts associated with anxiety about speaking can help in the process of relieving shyness.

Several studies employing this approach in treating communication apprehensive students have found it very effective.[6] However, this method, too, would be cumbersome to transfer wholly into the normal classroom. Nevertheless, it has several valuable implications which can be practically employed.

First, this approach reminds us that students arrive in class with preexisting beliefs (some of which are unrealistic and inhibiting) about others' reactions to their manner of speaking. It can be useful to bring these beliefs to the surface for examination. This can be done in several ways:

1. Ask students to discuss or write you a letter recalling the situation in the past in which they felt shy, including what others actually said to them, what decisions about such situations they made as a result of those events, and how satisfied they are about the validity of those decisions.
2. Ask students to develop a costs-and-benefits tally sheet about their shyness — listing times they were reticent, what benefits were gained (e.g., playing it safe, avoiding criticism, avoiding involvement), and what valued opportunity, action, relationship was lost, delayed, diminished, etc.
3. Ask students to list what they do when feeling shy (e.g., play music, overeat, read, get a headache) and how well these alternatives work for relieving the anxiety in the short run, in the long run.

4. Ask students to recall and list the important risks, chances, gambles they have taken in their lives, and then to note whether each proved wise or foolish. Next, ask what one currently potential risk in regard to social interaction might be, what they stand to gain or lose by pursuing it, what they say to themselves in support of taking and avoiding the risk, which arguments make more sense, and what they would advise someone else to do in such a situation.

5. Ask students to close their eyes and then decide whether or not they want to volunteer to participate in a communication exercise. They are to raise their hands if they agree to do so. Keeping their eyes closed, ask them to imagine an inner dialogue between two figures in their minds. One is the part of them that wanted to volunteer, and the other is the part that didn't. What each figure says, how each appears, and what each does gives them insight into the processes underlying their reticence.

Second, the insight approach to treating reticence reminds us as teachers to work toward modifying the messages students tell themselves that inhibit their participation. For example, they might believe that —

- To fumble or fail in an oral presentation is catastrophic.
- It is easier to avoid than to face risky, challenging situations.
- There is one correct way to go about making a social approach, and if they don't do it that way the outcome will be disastrous.
- Their past history in this area irrevocably determines how their present actions will turn out.
- It is necessary that everything they say must be completely acceptable to all their peers for them to survive socially.

These assumptions packed together may seem absurd, but one or more often exist in the minds of shy students. If we are alert for their presence, discuss them openly, share our own personal experiences with students, and suggest more rational, realistic modifications of each assumption, their impact on reticent students is likely to be markedly eased.

## SOCIAL SKILLS

Thus far, we have considered the emotional and cognitive aspects of shyness. At this point we will focus on its behavioral dimension. Quietness may be viewed as the absence or lack of appropriate social behaviors. Many

quiet people report that they withdraw from interaction opportunities because they simply do not know *how* to approach them or what to say.[47] They lack the communication skills necessary for achieving their social goals. From this viewpoint, treatment for reticence involves providing instruction in dealing with these problematic social situations.

This procedure, under different titles, has been used extensively with college students and adults. Phillips, at Pennsylvania State University, calls his approach "Rhetoritherapy."[60] This system is based on the notion that people communicate to have an impact on one another. Phillips asks reticent students what kinds of effects they desire and to pinpoint them as precisely as possible. He asks them to consider who might meet their communication needs and in what specific situations these transactions might occur. Students assess what needs of their listeners they themselves might meet and how they might present their messages and themselves so as to bring about their desired response. Thus, students are trained to be more rhetorically sensitive to others and more skilled in carrying out a variety of communication strategies.

A variant of this approach that has been used with shy students is "assertiveness training." It is generally limited to instruction intended to help people who tend to be passively tolerant of abusive behavior or those who fear that any show of strength will appear aggressive. It assists them in reowning their "right" to speak up for themselves and in articulating their points of view "assertively," without violating the rights of others. This approach is not concerned primarily with the impact one has on others. It assumes an optimally effective way of phrasing statements and does not encourage putting the decisive element in the recipient's hands. For example, if a shy student wishes to ask another to eat lunch with her/him, the student's assertive performance should be judged on how well the task was done, not on whether the other accepts or not (just as one individual has the right to request, the other person has an equal right to refuse). Such training is demonstrably effective in increasing assertive behavior.[49]

The teaching of social skills occurs not only when it is explicitly labelled as such. In classrooms, in addition to learning academic content material, students are also influenced by another, mostly unarticulated, "hidden" curriculum embedded within the school's structure, social climate, and images students and teachers have of each other. These influences subtly impart social behaviors, attitudes, and values, and provide the mechanism through which the school's socializing function takes place. The teacher constantly serves as a powerful tutor, model, and reinforcer for

particular ways of interacting.[38] Teachers generally concerned about shyness can incorporate unobtrusive remedial procedures throughout the school day.

There are also several other ways that more functional social skills have been *deliberately* nurtured in shy children. One method is providing praise and tangible rewards to *reinforce* and gradually increase the frequency of children's peer interactions.[40] Although such procedures generally increase the frequency of shy children's peer contacts, their behavior tends to return to baseline levels once reinforcement has been terminated.[37]

Another method is *modeling*. Socially isolated preschool children who have viewed videotapes of other children having positive experiences when they approach each other to join in an activity or conversation, and in which children performed social behaviors with peers such as imitating, smiling and laughing, giving tokens, or giving physical comfort signifying affection, were subsequently (up to several weeks later) observed to increase their peer interactions.[33]

Of course, these methods are used only in isolation during controlled experimental studies. In fact, evidence exists that a *combination* of reinforcement and modeling can be more effective than using each method alone.[35] The question-asking behavior of 36 Mexican-American second graders transferred much more effectively to natural settings when social modeling plus praise was used.[31]

Yet another method is providing *practice*. This is the approach most traditionally and commonly used. For most children, giving an oral performance or having to speak up in class when called upon does help to develop the skills and confidence needed to be socially effective. However, this is not true for all. Required participation applies best to students with low to moderate speech anxiety. The reticent child is likely to become more apprehensive rather than less if forced to communicate.[43]

Consequently, the teacher should provide classroom opportunities that *permit* oral participation in the learning process but should avoid establishing a system that *requires* it of all children. One way to accomplish this end is to structure small group interaction activities. In this context, exposure and pressure to perform are kept to a minimum, and the possibility of providing openings for shy children to interact is maximized. Role-playing and simulation games also provide this needed balance.

Mere practice, however, seems to alleviate the shy child's situation only temporarily. In several intervention studies, classroom activities such as performing in a skit were provided to increase isolated children's peer acceptance. Initial gains in peer status were not maintained in follow-up assessments.[35]

An additional element apparently needed in the process of developing improved social skills is *coaching*. In one study third- and fourth-grade socially isolated children were first verbally instructed in social skills. Next, they were provided an opportunity to practice these social skills by playing with a peer. Finally, they had a postplay review session with the coach. The instruction included discussion of social skills which were proposed as useful for making a game fun or enjoyable to play with another person: (a) participating in a game or activity, (b) cooperating (e.g., taking turns and sharing materials), (c) communicating (talking and listening), and (d) validating or supporting (e.g., giving attention or help). These children received higher sociometric ratings from the children they interacted with in the play sessions and also from nonpartners. At follow-up assessment, one year later, the coached children had moved toward even greater inclusion by peers.[38]

In summary, shy students often lack the skills needed for successful social interaction. These can be developed by providing or pointing out models for them to emulate or by providing deliberate instruction or coaching in desirable ways of interacting. This preparation should be followed up with a number of opportunities for them to practice dealing with others and with positive reinforcement for their successful efforts to do so.

The following are frameworks into which all four of these approaches can be structured into a classroom:

1. Students can learn to meet and carry on conversations with others by role-playing newspaper reporters who must contact and interview people in their community for feature articles.

2. Students can be given other investigative assignments that require social interaction, such as calling a department store to price specific items, calling a radio station to inquire about or request their favorite programming, calling a reference librarian to obtain an answer to an informational question, etc.

3. Students can prepare a social skills manual for students about to enter their grade or school in which they suggest several ways to meet people, favorite topics of conversation, comments or actions that are turn-offs, methods for deepening friendships, activities people enjoy outside school, approaches to settling disagreements, etc.

## ALTERING SELF-PERCEPTIONS

Research cited earlier suggests that shy people lack self-esteem. As long as students believe themselves less worthy than others, they are likely to consider their comments to be unwelcome and expect failure. The most ambitious and perhaps the most difficult approach to treating reticence is attempting to change the individual's view of self.

This approach is at the base of most psychotherapies. Therapists seek to help clients revise their view of themselves from negative to more self-accepting. This can be done on an "as if" basis through role-playing.

One such approach, Fixed-Role Therapy, was used specifically to relieve speech anxiety in college students. They were helped to describe what "roles" they adopted when speaking in public and what alternative roles were available. Students observed other people's responses to public speaking situations, inferred the roles each person was adopting, including the underlying thoughts and feelings, and compared them with their own. They developed a less anxiety-producing role for themselves and tried it out in their group. Self-report measures showed reduction of speech anxiety.[11]

The first step in altering self-perceptions is to increase sensitivity to how students see themselves now, i.e., to enhance self-awareness. This may at first increase self-consciousness and even seem detrimental. However, the process is much like learning to swim, ride a bicycle, or drive. It starts out awkwardly before the current, then more positive awarenesses are internalized, and the new self-perceptions begin to predominate automatically.

Some activities by which this process can be employed include the following:

1. Ask students to draw a line across a paper labeling the start of it BIRTH and the end NOW. Consider this to be a lifeline extending through all the years of their lives. Students can divide the line at the points at which significant changes in their social relationships occurred, e.g., a move, a new school, a death in the family, a birth of a sibling, etc. Then ask them to list the people most significant to them at each stage, how they felt about these relationships, and what happened between them and others during the times they felt best and worst about their relationships.
2. Ask students to recall, write, and perhaps share their most embarrassing moments with other people, their most close and happy moments, their conflicts, the times they were least and the times they were most genuinely themselves.

3. Ask students to recall and share the rules or admonitions their family members gave them about social etiquette, e.g., talking at dinner, being vocal when guests are visiting, making requests, disagreeing with parents, etc. Discuss whether or not these rules contributed to shyness.

A second step is to develop motivation to reexamine and consider changing their habitual self-perceptions. This involves tuning into values and goals that may be even more central, more at their core, than their pattern of shyness. If the energy from these core feelings, dreams, and beliefs can be harnessed in the effort toward personal growth, students are more likely to attempt new forms of social behavior. Exercises such as the following can facilitate this process.

4. Ask students to imagine what they would like their lives to be like by the end of this year, next year, five years from now, etc. Discuss what social interactions would be needed to fulfill these goals.

5. Ask students to imagine that they have only a month to live. Suggest that they write what they would want to communicate to their friends, parents, siblings, etc., to clarify how they feel about them. Discuss whether they have said or might say these things to them anyway.

The third step is the process of reidentifying themselves in positive terms, rather than with the negative self-attributions that lead to reticence. This shift is helped by seeing their old patterns as self-imposed, and therefore under their control, and by visualizing themselves as more successful in their interactions. The following exercises apply at this stage:

6. Ask students to list recent experiences in which they were more reticent than they would have liked. Then ask them to try explaining what caused each event. Discuss these attributions, looking for explanations based on inner, irreversible negative traits in oneself or others such as "stupid," "dumb," "a loner," etc.; explanations based on physical, social, economic, and political aspects of the situation; and for explanations based on malleable states of feeling, skill deficiencies, or discouraging thoughts. These hypothetical reasons should be encouraged in the reverse order in which they are listed since this order reflects the degree to which they can be controlled or improved by the students themselves.

7. Suggest that students sit comfortably with eyes closed and then bring to mind an instance in which they have been reticent. Then ask them to imagine what they would have preferred to do in that situation if they were not shy, visualizing every step of their actions as vividly as possible. The next time such an event arises, they can run through this visualization in their minds and can then feel more confident about actually acting out the non-shy behavior.

8. Ask students to list their personal strengths, abilities, interests, successes, personal assets. Then gather a bunch of magazines and newspapers and have students cut out words and pictures that can be put together into a collage which illustrates these positive things about themselves. Put the collage where they and others will see it.

The aforementioned approaches to relieving shyness were all found effective in a recent study of their relative impact.[77] In another study, anxiety-reducing exercises were found slightly more effective for reducing stage fright, and insight (or cognitive modification) treatment was more useful for reducing general social reticence.[51] In a third study, these methods were combined with a new wrinkle. Students who scored high on a communication apprehension scale were trained to provide individual help to others who were shy. Results indicated that both shy helpers and shy helpees improved significantly on all behavioral and self-report measures of communication apprehension.[18] (The helpers improved slightly more.) This approach suggests an effective and economical way to provide aid for reticent students.

A final approach to reducing communication apprehension synthesizes many of the others cited here. It involves student participation in regular (sometimes daily) group discussions that center on personal affective experiences. Several forms of this process have been developed. One is the Reality Technique developed by Morrison[54] in which students bring up personal problems faced in everyday life which are clarified through questioning. Their peers share similar experiences they have had, and from these accounts alternative responses or solutions are generated. The problem presenter for that day considers the potential consequences of each problem, selects one, and develops a plan for carrying it out.

Another approach is the Awareness Group developed by Friedman[19] which is based on the "magic circle" technique of Bessell and Palomares.[3] In this system, each day the teacher brings up a theme on which every child can share a personal experience. Examples related to shyness are "A Time I Held In What I Really Wanted to Say" or "A Time I Felt Shy About Joining a Group." Children and teacher volunteer to share incidents in their lives that apply. Everyone is asked to acknowledge listening and understanding. No responses are right or wrong. Common human feelings and compassion are emphasized.

By incorporating such a process into the daily life of the classroom, children's openness is preserved and shyness is prevented, anxiety about speaking is minimized, insight into shyness-producing events is developed, skills in personal sharing and listening are nurtured, and growth in self-esteem usually results.[1]

Teachers who draw from the material cited here and who give attention and support to the shy, reticent children in their classes will be contributing significantly to their students' personal growth and to their chances for success in their family, community, and vocational lives.

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